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ART FRONT

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NATIONAL ORGANIZATION

To meet the general call for information about the New York Artists' Union, the ART FRONT *has established this department as a permanent feature of the magazine. It will be under the auspices of the National Correspondence Committee of the New York Artists' Union. It will contain information given in answer to the numerous questions asked about the organizational problems of organizing artists' groups on an economic basis, the artistic standards of the new organizations and particular local problems of each group. It will also feature articles and correspondence from artists, artists' organizations and affiliated groups throughout the country.*

QUESTION: "What can a small group of artists desirous of doing something to alleviate the desperate economic conditions that confront the artists of our city do to improve them?"

Existing conditions make organization for artists imperative. With no prospect of private patronage renewing even the meager basis for financial support that they had, the artists, today, must turn to the Government and demand that it fulfil its responsibility toward the artists, as part of the unemployed; and that it also fulfil its responsibility toward using the crafts and arts talent of the artists for the benefit of the public, in the form of mural painting; decoration and sculpture in public buildings; the teaching of arts and crafts for children and adults; traveling exhibitions of paintings, drawings, small sculpture for the cities and villages in your vicinity. This responsibility can be best fulfilled by setting up art project jobs for artists.

The first thing to do is to draw up a general program, as above, and issue a call for artists to organize on an economic basis. A small group of professional artists could issue this call in the form of an invitation to all artists to attend a meeting to discuss the artist's situation. At this meeting a plan should be put forward to set up a project formulation committee, to be elected by the membership present. This committee should begin to work on an outline of the art work that could be done in the community. As a point of information, murals and sculpture can only be done for tax-supported buildings, such as schools, libraries, courts, municipal, state and federal buildings, etc. Teaching of arts and crafts is an art service project and classes can be held in both tax-supported buildings and semi-public institutions, such as Y. M.'s, Y. W.'s, settlement houses, etc. Traveling exhibitions can be placed in any public place.

Along with a program of art work, set up a program of working conditions, wages, representation, hours, etc. On the W.P.A. project in New York City, artists are being paid $103.40 a month, supervisors of murals, $115.00, for a 24-hour week. (The Artists' Union is pressing for a $2.00 hour-rate, 15-hour minimum week.) At present, we believe that the immediate wage demand should be the New York City prevailing wage paid to artists. The general membership, at a meeting, should then approve the outlined program. Draw up a petition that can be signed by as many artists and art supporters as possible. Keep pressing the local administrator of relief in your city for the employment of artists. In this case constancy is a very important virtue. A large delegation elected from the membership meeting should present the project plans, along with the petitions, to the administrator.

At this time, because of the urgency of immediate action, send up committees at once to the relief administrator asking for artists' jobs, while you prepare for the general membership action. After the campaign of delegations, further action will depend upon the local situation and the answers given by the local administrator. Use every form of publicity possible. Send press releases to the papers using your organizational name. An artists' organization, in most instances, is news. Use as many well-known local names of artists and public figures endorsing the proposed art projects as possible. An art project formulation in your city will depend largely upon your pres-

(*Continued on page* 15)

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ART FRONT

MARCH, 1936

THE NATIONAL NEGRO CONGRESS

BY a stroke of coincidence the National Negro Congress opened its sessions in Chicago on the same evening the Artists' Congress convened in New York. But there is more than coincidence in the movement of the Negro people for social and political equality and the movement of artists for the right to function as artists. Fundamentally both Congresses are phases of the same question.

When an entire people is hounded to the unbelievable degree the Negro is, no honest thought or action can be safe from attack. When bigotry is deliberately fostered to the point where reason is swept aside by the tides of blind prejudice, then social liberties are also vulnerable. When a national minority is made a national scapegoat, then we must turn apprehensively to Germany to see the ultimate logic of such persecution.

The Artists' Union not only supported the Negro Congress but sent a delegate to the Chicago meeting. We support the demands of the Negro people for political, social and economical equality. We know that by helping to fight for the rights of Negroes we are striking a strong blow against the forces of reaction and for the defense of the civil liberties of all.

NO WAR POSTERS

ART FRONT greets with pride the resolution made this month by members of the Artists' Union to refuse to make posters, paintings, sculpture, or cartoons that might be used to inspire the youth of America to bear arms in aggressive warfare. The Artists' Union is no pacific organization. It has shown its militant determination physically and creatively when the cause has been one with its own interests. Not only the fight around specific economic demands, but the fight for broad social issues has won its support, and artists have given of their time and energy to supply placards, floats and effigies for the struggle against reaction. But the artists in the Union recognize that aggressive war cannot be in their interests, for their good, either as artists or as humans. And they know, too, that the last war drafted not only the bodies of young Americans but also their talents. Almost everyone in the Union can remember the posters that put forth the tales of German atrocities; the billboards with Dame Liberty reaching for another hand-out; the effigies of the French Joan of Arc nestling the Belgian babies. Every corner saloon flaunted its art exhibit; every shop had its masterpiece. The schools, not satisfied with the genius of America's Best Artists, went even further. Art teachers taught drawing and painting through war subjects; they devoted the class time to the manufacture of poisonous propaganda through the medium of art. In 1917, the government was so aware of the value of the artist's abilities that a report was turned in to the Department of Intelligence giving in detail a plan to mobilize the creative skills of the country into the proper channel.

Remembering this, the Artists' Union recognizes the potential power for good or evil it holds in its hands, and the dangerous rôle that power can play, if unleashed on a path of destruction. The Union has resolved to fight against the destruction of body and the corruption of talent.

THE PUBLIC USE OF ART

THE Federal Art Project Gallery, opened only six weeks ago, in the heart of New York's shopping district, has already fulfilled part of its function of encouraging the public use of art by the exhibitions of works produced under the Art Project. These exhibitions were of mural designs and sketches for non-federal buildings, of easel paintings by teachers and other artists on the job, and were attended by the federal and state administrators of many departments, artists and their friends, directors of hospitals, libraries, schools, settlement houses, museums, as well as art students and New York's art-interested public. The expressed purpose of this gallery was to enable the public and cooperating sponsors to see for themselves the results of the federal art program in New York City projects.

The response has been very encouraging. The visitors' book at the gallery is filled with frank expressions of praise and admiration for the works exhibited and a general desire that the projects be continued and made permanent. There is not sufficient space to detail all the enthusiastic praise of the critics and public. Emily Genauer, art critic of the *N .Y. World-Telegram* says, "Many who watched the start of the project condoned it, in the face of condemnation, as an enterprise which would at least help the destitute artists, even if the net result in valuable pictures were nil. That the pictures would be as excellent as these, and that the government would realize a return much greater than its original investment, not even the most optimistic among them dared hope."

Among artists the opinion is that the project is showing signs of maturity. Many compare it favorably to the current museum and gallery shows and feel safe in predicting better and better shows and shows that will set the pace in quality among exhibitions. Many of the project exhibitors are relatively unknown and find the project their first opportunity to exhibit. This lack of opportunity to exhibit is not due to any fault of the artists, but to the museums' and galleries' demand that the artist have a pre-depression status as a well-known artist before he or she is invited to exhibit. Naturally the

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great majority of artists, many of them very good and promising, have been eliminated by this prerequisite. Many others have been buried in the makeshift arrangements of cooperative gallery and group shows. No wonder that until the past year the run of vitality among shows of artists has been pretty low and generally fitted in grooves of dull, conventional mediocrity. There was prevalent a feeling of despair and discouragement. The only encouraging note was the constructive militancy of the organized body of artists, the Artists' Union, that demanded project jobs for all artists who were willing to work.

Since the opening up of more jobs for artists, the feeling of artistic integrity among artists has been reinforced precisely because of the use of their talents and the public use of their work. Artists, no matter what the financial considerations are, are instinctively compelled to produce their best work. That is why on the project this force—a tradition among artists—will be the best answer to the charges of "boon-doggling."

We can only hope that in further exhibitions the artistic tastes of the cooperating sponsors, the schools, the libraries, etc., will be enlarged to include choices of the more modern and progressive schools of art. Meanwhile, a lending library of works produced on the project, paintings, prints and watercolors, should be made available to both institutions and general public for a small nominal fee to cover insurance. We are sure that, with such an arrangement, everyone will find the work of art to his choosing and every work of art, its appreciator.

At the same time artists who have always maintained and preserved their artistic consciousness are also acquiring an economic consciousness which will help to make, by organized struggle, a Permanent Art Project with adequate compensation.

THE COMING WORLD'S FAIR

LAND is being cleared, real estate is being appraised, engineers are planning transportation facilities, and architects are designing buildings for the coming World's Fair to be held in New York City for the year 1939. The World's Fair promises to be one of the most outstanding achievements in the realm of international expositions and fairs.

Despite all the current publicity on the World's Fair, no mention has been made of the embellishment and decorative plans for the Fair, or of painting or sculpture for the contemplated plazas and buildings. Yet a few artists have already been approached for designs and mural decorations. Why the secrecy? We are sure that, if the proposed plans are fair and equitable, they should be able to stand the light of publicity. Artists are very much concerned about the arts' contribution to this World's Fair and are asking for a complete and informative public statement from the committee in charge. This public statement would do much to allay the suspicion that political and personal favoritism will play a large part in the awarding of jobs and contracts for the decoration and sculpture for the World's Fair.

While the supervision of the Fair is in the hands of a private corporation, it has the cooperation of the municipal and public officials and is essentially a public affair. Artists as contributors and public have a right to demand a fair and open conduct of expenditures to be used for the arts and decoration. Furthermore, the Artists' Union believes that in the conduct of the awards and jobs for art work opportunities should be open to all artists. The Union can point out the excellent results obtained from another of the public projects, the W.P.A. Art Project, in which such opportunities have been won for the artists by the two-year fight of the Artists' Union.

PAINTING IN FASCIST ITALY

by Margaret Durec

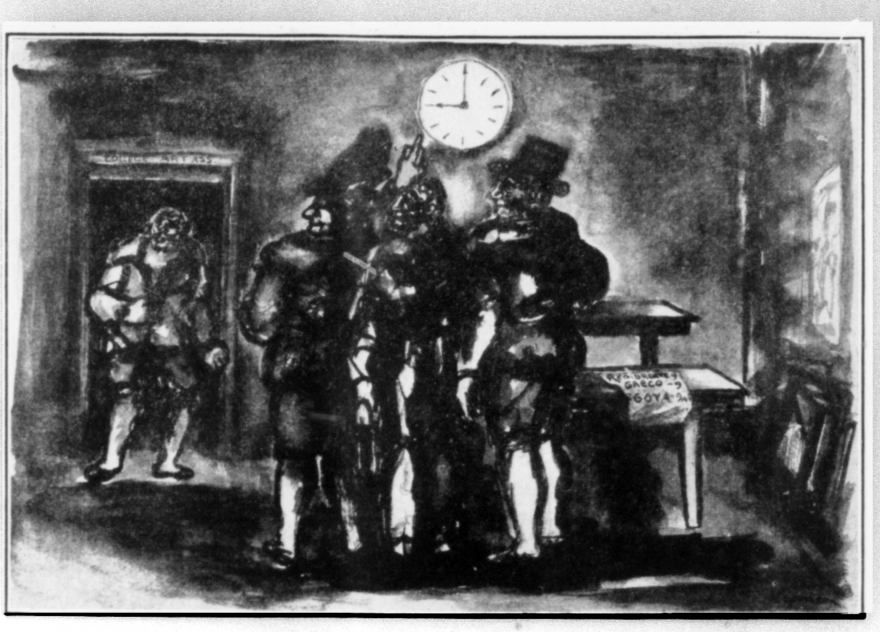
TO understand the development of painting in fascist Italy, one must understand the nature of the fascist state. Though fascism poses as revolutionary, its aim is to maintain the existing class relations, rather than to destroy them. In contrast to liberal capitalism, which tries to deny the existence of classes, and therefore favors an abstract political equality, Italian fascism emphasizes the class structure of society. In an article on "The Doctrine of Fascism" (*Enciclopedia Italiana, V. XIV*), Mussolini states: "Fascism denies democracy's absurd conventional lie of political equality, its cloak of collective responsibility, and its myth of happiness and indefinite progress." His favorite definition of fascism is "hierarchy," and a political review which he edits is called *"Gerarchia."*

The capitalist class seeks to maintain itself not only by a hierarchial social organization, but also by an aggressive foreign policy. In the article quoted, Mussolini also wrote: "Apart from all present political considerations, fascism does not believe in the possibility or the utility of perpetual peace."

Such an economic system is not calculated to bring rejoicing and gladness to the Italian people, and the doctrine is equal to the occasion. We are told that "fascism scorns the idea of economic 'happiness' which would be realized socialistically and almost automatically at a given moment in the evolution of economy by assuring to everyone the maximum of well-being. Fascism rejects the materialist conception of a possible happiness, and abandons it to the economists of the eighteenth century." (*Ibid.*)

These tenets of fascism—hierarchy, jingoism, the rejection of happiness and progress—are very important factors in the formation of fascist Italian painting. One reads over and over again in the Italian critical journals that fascism is a new civilization, and that art must express the new order. We shall see how these characteristics have been expressed in painting.

Contemporary Italian painting is readily divided into three categories: Futurist, Avanguardist, and Fine Art. The two former are politically oriented, frankly imperialist in purpose, and pretend to express the fascist "revolution." Neither is considered fine art, and only the Avanguardist art receives state support in the form of commissions. "Fine Art" is ostensibly non-political, non-"revolutionary," and an expression of order. The state takes all possible means to support it.



"You'd better hurry up, Michael Angelo, it's nine o'clock!" **Ben Kopman**

Futurist Painting

FUTURIST art has the longest fascist history. It is, in fact, proto-fascist rather than fascist. A few years before the World War began a group of poets and artists organized to assist the jingoist movement in Italy. Their leader was the writer Marinetti. In 1909 they founded the futurist movement. Their manifesto, published in Paris, proclaimed in stentorian phrases: "Courage, audacity, rebellion, are the essential elements of our poetry. . . . We wish to glorify war—only hygiene of the world—militarism, patriotism. . . . We wish to free this country (Italy) from its fetid gangrene of professors, archeologists, guides and antiquarians."

In 1913 they stated their political program:

"A larger navy and a larger army; a people proud of being Italian; for war, only hygiene of the world, and for the greatness of an Italy which is intensively agricultural, industrial, and commercial.

"Economic defense and patriotic education of the proletariat.

"Cynical foreign policy, aggressive astuteness, colonial expansion, free trade.

"Irredentism — Panitalianism — primacy of Italy.

"Anti-clericalism and anti-socialism.

"Cult of progress and velocity, of sport, physical strength, bold courage, heroism and danger, against the obsession of culture, classical instruction, the museum, library, and ruins. Suppression of the academies and conservatories.

"Removal of the dead, the old and the opportunistic, in favor of audacious youth." (From Marinetti, *"Futurismo e Fascismo."* The following quotations are from various speeches collected in the same volume.)

Joined with the imperialist program is unbounded admiration for the machine and antagonism to sensuality. "Liberate the world from the tyranny of love! We are satiated with erotic adventure, luxury, sentimentalism and nostalgia!" The admiration of the machine is carried to such lengths that Marinetti considers that man's ideal should be to become identified with the machine, to finally become a machine. Adopting Lamarckian evolution, he said: "We believe in the possibility of an incalculable number of human transformations, and we say without smiling, that in the flesh of man sleep wings." The futurists are frankly mystical, and Marinetti has said that of the various definitions suggested for Futurism he prefers that of the Theosophists: "The futurists are the mystics of action."

The futurists did not limit themselves to making speeches. They also painted or composed designs which were to serve as war propaganda, or to express their dynamic internal explosions. When Italy entered the war, they were among the first volunteers. Today they are very proud of their list of war dead. Soon after the war started Mussolini was borrowing slogans from them, and the futurists became the first fascists. Marinetti proudly relates how his futurists put to rout a march of unarmed workers, with women and children at their head, by gunfire. His conceit is revealed in an incident of this "battle"—"I punched a young socialist on the head; he fell, and I shouted to him, grabbing him by the collar, 'Yell *Viva Serrati*, imbecile, and not *Viva Lenin!*' My exceedingly stupid adversary did not understand this, my lesson in European politics, inculcated with fists."

THE futurists expected, and still hope, to be the official fascist artists. But they have never attained that position, nor are they likely to. In the days of the march on Rome, Mussolini said: "We are a young people, who wish to and must create, and refuse to be a syndicate of hotel-keepers and museum guardians. Our artistic past is admirable, but, as for me. I must have entered a museum twice at most." However, not many years later he deserted this position, to start an active career of opening art and archeology expositions. Fascism found that it was to its interests to promote the business of the hotel-keeper, and the memories of the past, in order to borrow from the past some of its glory and a semblance of stability. Mussolini identifies himself with the Caesars, and any attack upon the antique emperors is considered a blow to the prestige of fascism, as was demonstrated when a newspaper was suspended for adversely criticizing Julius Caesar. As we shall see later, Fine Art stands for all which Marinetti sought to eradicate.

It would be wrong to say that futurism is no longer important in Italy, as many foreign and Italian critics have done. It is true that futurists do not receive state prizes, subsidies, or commissions, and in order to continue painting most of them engage in commercial art, and they have even so far departed from their original program that one of their outstanding artists, Fillia, has resorted to

In Memoriam
IRVING DIENER

church work. Nevertheless, in spite of protests, they still receive a great deal of wall space at exhibits, they are permitted to exhibit abroad, and they publish magazines. Their strange position was indicated in the last Biennial Exposition at Venice. They had an independent wing of the Italian pavilion, which, as the catalogue informed the visitor, had its separate entrance. In the statistical analysis of the exhibitors, one read that there were three categories: Italian, Futurist, and Foreign Artists.

The painting of the futurists today is considerably different from their early work. Then, they were analytic in their representation of movement. Today the forms are simplified and clarified. Balla's famous dog on a leash, with the delightful humor of its multiplied legs, is replaced by his Enamored Numbers, which is nothing but a series of three-dimensional numbers on some horizontal shelves, looking very much like a hat display. In general, the present painting may be divided into two groups: metaphysical abstraction and simplified cubism. Fillia and Prampolini, the most important painters of the movement, belong to the first group. Of the other group, Dottori is probably the finest.

WHEN the metaphysical painters deal with religious subjects, they are understandable, but their abstractions without titles have only decorative value, and the addition of titles is seldom enlightening. The direct inspiration of the futurist artist is still the machine, not as the servant and creation of man, but as a superior expression, existing independently of men. In the early years of the movement it was bound up with the need of industrialization. Today the admired machines is the airplane, the tool of imperialist expansion by war. Fillia wrote very recently: "Only a people enamored of the machine can be a great belligerent people, familiar with the order of war, aggressive, resistant, and conquering." (In *"Stile Futurista," July,* 1934.)

The use of the airplane is not accidental but planned. Air-verse, air-pictures, and even air-advertising copy for biscuits and such-like is the present official futurist program as pronounced by Marinetti. To the metaphysicians, Prampolini and Fillia, the air program is an opportunity for a flight from reality, a flight into the unknown. It is presumably an expression of the greatest heroism and bravery. Marinetti, in a speech, tried to demonstrate "the decisive importance of an Italian movement of air-pictures, which, in the full triumph of fascist aviation, abstracts itself from the terrestrial forms already painted and sung, in order to express instead dynamically, without analysis and synthesis, the entire sky, external-internal of the country." (In the Catalogue of the Nineteenth Biennial.)

Some of the futurists, such as Dottori and Tato, do not depart so radically from reality. Tato paints airplanes which in appearance are even heavier than photographic representations. They are futurist because he treats air and light as solids. Dottori, a more interesting painter, depicts the whirling appearance of a city and countryside seen from a wheeling airplane. The forms are simple geometrical solids, lacking all the analysis of Picasso's cubism. The color is bright and flat. In the early futurist work explosiveness was expressed; now rotation.

Futurist painting is certainly dynamic, but its program is merely action. Not action toward a goal, but action for the sake of action. One of the first slogans of the futurists was *"Marcire, non macire"*—march, don't delay. This slogan is found repeatedly in their literature. Fillia says that futurism is "the mechanical sensibility that does not weaken youth with the hope of eternal peace and physical inertia." Action, which to the futurists is war action, is an end in itself. Today, the revolutionary character of futurism exists only in its non-academic style. The chief intention of the artists is the furtherance of imperialist expansion.

Futurism serves fascism as a movement which serves to channelize some of the existing turbulent elements. However, revolution among the lower classes cannot be so characterized. Futurist painting is too abstract to carry any meaning to them. We shall see, in considering Avanguardist art, that when fascism is presented to the workers it is not given any aspect of rebellion. *"Marcire, non macire"* is permitted to the youth of the upper classes, to make them better lieutenants. It is only in this sense that futurist painting in Italy continues to be the expression of "rebellious youth."

Avanguardist Painting

THE Museum of the Revolution was opened to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the March on Rome. Its tremendous signicance can be judged from the fact that two years after it had opened it was still front-page news. Banner headlines carried the news that the King of Siam or some other official visitor had visited the Museum in the company of some fascist dignitary. Although there is no important painting in the Museum, the arrangements and decorations were chiefly the work of painters, and consequently it should be mentioned in an analysis of Avanguardist art.

The exhibit consists of photographic material and newspaper accounts from the entry into the World War until the establishment of fascism. The Italian painters were called upon to arrange this material, and to do some painting when necessary to illustrate the material, or to do other artistic work. For example, there is the story of the fascist hero, Berta, who was thrown off a bridge in an encounter with some workers. This is commemorated by a bridge built against the wall, with the name "Berta" written in huge letters above it. Apart from the interesting display of the material, the artists designed symbols to give meaning to the exhibit. Huge flags, faces, and words are represented in full relief. They are massive, simplified, and overpowering in their rhythmical repetitions.

Of greatest interest is the treatment of the word, which assumes a sort of independent existence. *"Dux"* which appears often, is given an appearance of power, and strength, and architectural fixity which even transcends this expression in the representations of Mussolini. It becomes by association a superior portrait of Il Duce. In its fixity and solidity it proclaims the imperishable and eternal nature of fascism, just as the pyramids of Egypt proclaimed the eternal endurance of its earthly gods, the kings.

This same character of permanence and solidity is found in Avanguardist painting. For example, Santagata's murals for the House of the Mothers of the Mutilated. Here, drawn in an archaistic, classisictic style, are gutless, massive figures, marching in a pageant glorifying war. Even the Avanguardist skier by the same artist is shown as a granite-like figure, holding the skis as an attribute.

Avanguardist painting is unpleasant, unimaginative, and of little artistic merit. The message of this art is actually stated in the Hall of Honor of the Museum of the Revolution. There, on either side of a tremendous statue of Mussolini (beneath which is his verbal portrait, *"Dux,"* in letters three meters high), are Mussolini's favorite maxims: Believe—Obey—Fight, and Order—Authority—Discipline. This is Mussolini's interpretation of the fascist "revolution" for the general public. Here is a frank statement of the barracks nature of the fascist "civilization" for the masses.

Thus, if Futurist art is above all the expression of jingoism, the Avanguardist art, which is addressed to the masses, is an expression of hierarchy.

(This article will be concluded in the April issue of ART FRONT.)

The Psychiatrist

William Gropper

Courtesy of A.C.A. Gallery

THE WIT OF WILLIAM GROPPER

by Harold Rosenberg

CONTRARY to what some people would expect from a left-wing artist, one of the outstanding characteristics of Gropper's show at the A.C.A. Gallery is its great variety in all respects—subject matter, mood, manner and even medium. What the show says to the audience is: It is no longer a question of crudely conceived "left-wing" pictures of bread-lines, pickets, mounted police; everything of value in the art of painting is becoming the property of the revolutionary movement. It will soon be possible to speak of a revolutionary landscape, of a revolutionary still-life.

Gropper's show is a single action on the part of a revolutionary artist. On one wall is a selection from his famous political cartoons, humorous, biting, and scandalous attacks on the rulers of American society. Some of these satirical themes recur in the paintings: "The Senate," "Art Jury," "Gentleman," "A Judge." But the handling of the satirical painting "The "Senate" relates it to the non-satirical painting called "Strike" (although the static, somnolent character evoked in the first by certain cubistic devices is replaced in the second by an energetic disposition of forms), and the energy of "Strike" carries directly into such pieces as "Suicide," "Klansman," "Survivors," painted from a totally different technical angle and in a mood remote from "modern" painting. Thus, in spite of obvious influences from such dissimilar sources as Ryder, Breughel, Japanese painting, primitive art, Daumier, Forain, cubism—the show creates a remarkable effect of unity and a thoroughly integrated impact upon the sensibilities.

Once this single communicative effect of the show is established, it is possible to see how non-social paintings like "Burning Wheat," "Tiflis—U.S.S.R.," "Picnic," "Landscape," "Still Life," "Village Character," "Gentleman," etc., enrich the cartoons and political paintings "Strike," "The Senate," "Soup," "Suicide" with local color and a world-environment, at the same time that they derive their association with the political art a special meaning which they could not possess in a roomful of street scenes and apple-arrangements. Paintings which belong together have a cumulative power. The principle—art is propaganda—does not imply that each individual work of art must contain in itself a complete argument leading toward a revolutionary conclusion. The principle—art is propaganda—recognizes the fact that the picture-world of the painter includes within it elements of many kinds, some confined to the world of simple appearance, some introducing into appearance action-motives and a critique of values; and that this picture-world, as an entirety, deflects the mentality of society in one direction or another. This is true of the art of painting as a whole and it is true also of the complete works of the individual painter.

Gropper's exhibition proves that the revolutionary painter, far from being a

grim specialist of a world seen in a contracted focus, is precisely the major discoverer of new pictorial possibilities as well as of new uses for the old.

There will be two chief points of criticism against Gropper—(1) that he has discovered no new formal or technical approach to the problem of revolutionary painting and (2) that his paintings themselves show a facility, a virtuosity even, of application which is lacking in profundity.

To the first criticism, it is necessary to respond: Yes, it is true Gropper has developed no new technical apparatus especially designed for use in painting revolutionary pictures. It is true he openly employs the devices of Breughel, Ryder, cubism, Japanese landscape art, Forain and Daumier; in fact, there are very few painters who reject to such a degree any effort to conceal their origins. But what does this mean? Does not the very frankness with which he loads revolutionary material into the old apple-carts of art-technique constitute an assertion that these vehicles have come down the same historic road? Does not the whole exhibition indicate that the art developed in and adopted by modern civilization since its beginnings possesses a natural continuity with the revolutionary impulse of the art of today and tomorrow? Painting, filled with a new perspective, will develop new techniques, just as a society organized on the basis of new relations will develop new machines; but, in this development of the new, that which is still productive in the old plays an important, if not a decisive, part. Though Gropper has not yet developed a new form for revolutionary painting, he has, by his easy and graceful mastery of the materials of social struggle, by his presentation of it, as it were, *from the inside*, without strain, carried forward the possibility of technical discovery in revolutionary art. Instead of waiting for a revolutionary esthetic to grow out of the air, or attempting to distinguish revolutionary art from other types of art by the rejection of all technical values, he has contributed to revolutionary art and to its dynamic history by simply painting revolutionary pictures of excellent quality. If this is a simplification, it is a simplification that had become very necessary.

The easiness and gaiety of Gropper's pictorial communications, his unworried ecclecticism, will create in some minds an impression of superficiality and artistic carelessness. This question of superficiality is by no means an uncomplicated one. Granted that, on a few occasions, thinness of paint-quality and slight weaknesses in the internal development of form disturb the trained eye; granted that the adaptations are, in paintings like "Klansman" and "Burning Wheat," somewhat too reminiscent of their originals, and that the mood inherited by the "Klansman" goes too far toward romanticising, involuntarily, the abject and contemptible figure of the hooded night-rider. Such deficiencies may be validly noted; yet they fail to form a basis for condemning Gropper's work. Easiness of manner and even a certain type of carelessness are not inconsistent with serious purpose; any more than hard work and a homeopathic brooding over the response a work of art will achieve for itself are inconsistent with pretentiousness and bad faith. One has only to contrast the easiness of Gropper with the labored yet slick finish of Joe Jones to be convinced on this point.

The busy Gropper makes his statement as best he can and goes ahead to something else. From his training in caricature he derives a decisiveness of purpose which converts all his technical acquisitions into instruments with a special preconceived utility in each case. He does not stop and grow heavy over a painting, because what he is concerned with is some dominant feature of the subject-matter which he has isolated. Sometimes this essential aspect seems so completely rendered that other qualities are neglected (*Eg.* F. D. R.'s Speech). But out of this coherent purposefulness of each painting arises a unity remarkable within such a multiplicity of modes. And often, as in "Psychiatrist" and "Art Jury," the essential caricature combines with lyricism, movement, and fantasy to produce an inescapable judgment which seems almost as if it emanated from the best intelligence of society itself, a deft profundity of the enlightened mind, in comparison with which the ponderous profundities of our more "spiritual" art seem to belong to the drowned confusions of some earlier day.

NEW CONTENT - NEW FORM

by Grace Clements

A NEW aesthetic, stemming from surrealism, cubism, and Cezanne's classicism, is finding expression in so remote a place as Hollywood, California. The exponents of this "subjective-classicism" who call themselves post-surrealists, are working for the creation of an art which achieves classical unity through multiple perception — visual, psychological and philosophical.

It may be that among contemporary artists everywhere there are similar developments, pointing the way to an enriched technical and formal foundation, highly adaptable to the new requirements that art must meet today—an art which subjectively will express the social aspirations of today, while in technical effort it will cerebrally parallel the scientific and psychological contributions of our time.

Of the contemporary artists who are becoming socially conscious, and who desire to create an art which reflects that consciousness, too few have discovered the inadequacies of the technique and approach to which they are accustomed. Whereas in some cases a realization of this incongruity of form and content has produced disastrously long periods of unproductiveness, from the artists who persist in making the old scaffoldings suffice, we find not only a great deal of hybrid art, but art totally unexpressive of its intended objective.

Many of these artists are highly competent. They produced fine things in their "art-for-art's-sake" period. They have recognized the falsity of their ivory tower retreats. They have joined forces with their fellow workers "toward a new world." In becoming socially conscious they have made big strides—and still there is a paucity of vital revolutionary art in America. What is the reason?

No longer is mere technical facility a sufficient excuse for a work of art. No longer does the old premise of balanced composition, linear design, spatial relationship, or color harmony serve to reflect the conflict which the socially conscious artist strives to express and so often miserably fails in achieving.

Occidental art, as we know it, has concerned itself with brilliant facets. It has been an art held within rigid dimensions. Even in its most ambitious form it tended toward the anecdotal through adherence to the norm of fixed visual perception. In ecclesiastical art it served for the glorification of the Church. Among the Flemish, it portrayed fragments of material well-being. Whether it be the fleshiness of Rubens or the frivolities of the French court, the tortured flesh of Goya's Spain or the romantic picturesqueness of Delacroix—there is in common the *fixed* point of view, which is the inevitable result of linear perspective and the frame-bound composition.

In Western art, the cubists were prob-

ably the first to break away from the tradition of the fixed *visual* perception, but, being so wholly absorbed with their new technical problem, they experimented only with the customary "props" of the studio. Their chief contribution has been an enriched vocabulary created by a *complex* visual concept. It was left to the surrealists to abandon the norm in subject, making excursions into the field of psychology and the subconscious, employing the complexity of objects, both related and unrelated in form, function or idea.

Abstractionism (cubism, purism, etc.) and surrealism have obvious deficiencies for the socially conscious artist. In the former, subject has been annihilated. In the latter, aesthetic unity has been destroyed. However both take their place in historical development, neither can be ignored for what it has contributed.

The question still remains—what will be the forms in which the new content may be expressed? It is puerile to expect a revolutionary art to spring into existence merely on the strength of good intentions or sincere convictions. These are only the motivating forces. An examination of *cause and effect* is of primary importance to the understanding and interpreting of the material from which we are to create. Next is the necessity of projecting this knowledge *plastically*. Since cause and effect embrace a multiple concept, it is inevitable that the old art forms concerned with a uni-visual concept are hopelessly inadequate.

Let us take a phenomenon of our present social system—a bread line—as a subject for a painting. Will the mere picturization or even dramatization of a bread line convey the *reasons* for its existence? We must answer—no. These people waiting for a bowl of soup might be too indolent to work for it! There is nothing in the *appearance* of these men and women to show that *through no fault of their own* they are unable to procure employment. There is nothing to show the suffering from starvation and deprivation. The outward effect of ragged and emaciated forms does little to distinguish these as disemployed persons. Is it not the existence of capitalism revealing its inherent contradictions which is responsible for this bread line? Here is the point of differentiation in *content*. It must also be the point of differentiation in *form*.

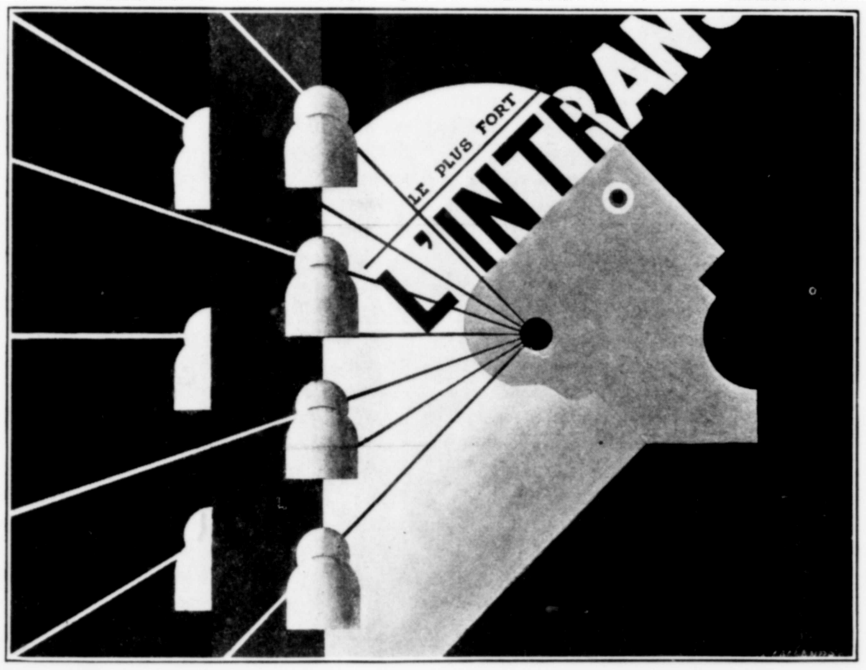
Actually the surrealists have given us the key to the answer. Their weakness was their attempt to make an automatic art, uncontrolled by the conscious mind. Their significance was their use of psychological phenomena, especially through their use of associative ideas. We, too, must deal with subjective associative ideas, but ideas of extreme complexity which must be controlled by the *head* no matter how much fire the *heart* may contain. It will be a cerebral art rather than an emotional one; that is, an art *calculated* in its organization. Because we must observe the limitations of our medium, we must convey ideas which can be optically apprehended. But, most important, we must *direct* the comprehension of the idea so that our meaning will be precise and clear.

Montage, a term borrowed from the cinema, which, by *conflict* of two or more factors unlike in kind but united in idea, create a *climax*, is a method not unsympathetic to adaptability in the field of painting. There is much to be learned about kinetic values and their use. This does not mean that a painting should be expected to compete with the motion picture, and certainly not to imitate it. But insofar as both mediums are concerned with ideas expressed through form, and the visual and subjective perception of it, it is inevitable that they shall exert an influence upon each other.

Again the surrealists, through their creation of subjective mood, have contributed an element of extreme value to the socially conscious painter. By the use of provocative forms objects of simple or ordinary character, when inter-related of juxtaposed, may create an entirely new and significant meaning. The indication of time and space is within the range of possibilities through sequences of idea or subjective mood. The psychological or subjective value of the parts of the picture will dictate their size, shape, importance, etc., in relation to the whole, and as they are to affect the spectator.

Aside from their multiple-vision concept, the abstractionists, in their employment of applied tactile material, have indicated yet another source of widening the contemporary form and technique. However, no longer will tactile experience serve merely for sensory aesthetic pleasure but for subjective reaction.

As briefly outlined, it will be seen that a new art synthesis is not something to be drawn from thin air. By no means should our knowledge of past art be thrown overboard. Not only does the past condition the present, it may also serve as a springboard to new concepts and new achievements. No matter how much art may differ in appearance and meaning according to time and place, there are certain constants which establish its universatility and timelessness, regardless of the temporal circumstances which were directly responsible for it. This quality, which art of social content today must also have, if anything but a transitory effect is to be achieved, is that which gives expression to fundamental human experiences and answers a fundamental human need. It is to create order out of chaos. Form and content will always remain inseparable parts of a work of art. For the vital rôle demanded of art today we must develop a vital form, based on the scientific and dialectic material which creates this new content.



Poster **Cassandre**

Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art

RACE, NATIONALITY AND ART

by Meyer Schapiro

MANY artists agree as a matter of course that the art of a German must have a German character, of a Frenchman, a French character, of a Jew, a Jewish character. They believe that national groups, like individual human beings, have fairly fixed psychological qualities, and that their art will consequently show distinct traits, which are unmistakable ingredients of a national or racial style. They assume that French art throughout its long history is distinguished from all of German art by qualities of elegance, tastefulness, formality, which no German can ever acquire, unless he has French blood; and, similarly, they attribute to German art a necessary violence, exaggeration, fantasy, realism and irrationality, which are repugnant to French taste.

Such distinctions in art have been a large element in the propaganda for war and fascism and in the pretense of peoples that they are eternally different from and superior to others and are therefore, justified in oppressing them. The racial theories of fascism call constantly on the traditions of art; its chief emblems are drawn from ancient motifs of ornament. Where else but in the historic remains of the arts does the nationalist find the evidence of his fixed racial character? His own experience is limited to one or two generations; only the artistic monuments of his country assure him that his ancestors were like himself, and that his own character is an unchangeable heritage rooted in his blood and native soil. For a whole century already the study of the history of art has been exploited for these conclusions.

From such views important consequences are drawn for American art and society. It is taught that the great national art can issue only from those who really belong to the nation, more specifically, to the Anglo-Saxon blood; that immigration of foreigners, mixture of peoples, dilutes the national strain and leads to inferior hybrid arts; that the influence of foreign arts is essentially pernicious; and that the weakness of American art today is largely the result of alien influences.

These opinions are only part of a larger view of American society as a whole, a view which condemns Negroes, Indians, Japanese, Mexicans, Jews, Italians and Slavs, as inferior elements, and which justifies their oppression as an economic and cultural necessity of the dominant "race." As political reaction grows, every argument which supports the notion of fixed racial and national differences, acquires a new relevance. It provokes powerful divisions within the masses of the people, who are becoming more articulate and aggressive in their demands for a decent living and control over their own lives. The basic antagonism of worker toward capitalist, debtor toward creditor, is diverted into channels of racial antagonism, which weakens and confuses the masses, but leaves untouched the original relations of rich and poor. A foreign enemy is substituted for the enemy at home, and innocent and defenseless minorities are offered as victims for the blind rage of economically frustrated citizens. The defenders of existing conditions are enabled to stigmatize as un-American, and therefore useless to the United States, whatever successful efforts the workers and farmers of other countries have made in the struggle for their own well-being. No wonder that the arguments for racial and national peculiarity are supported by the most reactionary groups in America.

But many liberal, and even radical, artists who uncompromisingly reject nationalism, share the belief in fixed racial or national characters in art. It permits an easy explanation of the differences in the arts of modern peoples. It enables one, in ignorance of the complexity of factors which determine the forms of art, to refer the art of a country to a permanent local character, as one refers a single work to the personality of its author. The artist unconsciously supports the very theories which will threaten his artistic independence. He may denounce the view that Negroes and Jews are inherently inferior to Europeans, but he accepts the distinctions between Negro, Italian, German and French art as a matter of permanent psychological traits.

There are Negro liberals who teach that the American Negro artist should cultivate the old African styles, that his real racial genius has emerged most powerfully in those styles, and that he must give up his effort to paint and carve like a white man. This view is acceptable to white reactionaries, who desire, above all things, to keep the Negro from assimilating the highest forms of culture of Europe and America. It is all the more dangerous because it appears on first thought to be an admission of the greatness of African Negro art, and therefore favorable to the Negro. But observed more closely, it terminates in the segregation of the Negro from modern culture. African Negro art is the product of the past conditions of African tribal life. To impose such an art on the modern American Negro is to condemn him to an inferior cultural status. Moreover, the modern Negro, whether African or American, could not possibly reproduce the classical African art; he could turn out only inferior pastiches, like the European fakers who fabricate pseudo-African sculpture for ignorant tourists.

* * *

The conception of racial or national constants in art, considered scientifically, has three fatal weaknesses.

In the first place, the empirical study of the art of highly civilized countries during a long period of time has shown beyond question that great historical changes in society are accompanied by marked changes in the character of the arts. Because of the real historical diversity of styles within a single nation, its art cannot be significantly described by a dominant or constant psychological trait; the arbitrariness and empty generality of such far-embracing descriptions ("European art is dynamic, Asiatic art is static, etc.") are notorious, and only a superficial knowledge of the history of

art is needed in order to contradict the commonly accepted generalizations. The tradition of French art is not simply one of elegance and tastefulness or of clarity, order and logic. These vaguely defined qualities emerge only at certain times and under special conditions. In the period from 1830 to 1860 it is France which produces the most realistic and also the most romantic art; there is no German Delacroix, no German Daumier; and the realism of the German schools sometimes takes as its model the work of the Frenchman Courbet. If, between 1905 and 1920, German expressionism is the most vehement and tormented art in Europe, in supposed accord with the German nature, the word for contentment, domestic comfort, untroubled coziness in art is *"Biedermeier,"* a German style of the second third of the nineteenth century. Even the most stable arts, like the Egyptian which is the classic example of cultural immobility, change their expressive character under the pressure of great social and economic changes. The art of Egypt during Byzantine rule, the so-called Coptic art, has little to do with the older Pharaonic art and in the same way the Moslem art of Egypt differs from the preceding Coptic. The presumed racial-psychological characters of an art are developed and transformed historically, and have no known connection with the heredity of a people.

It is true that remarkable resemblances have been found in the modern and ancient arts of a region. But these are not fixed resemblances, due to some intangible property of the blood of the inhabitants of a country. They often proceed from a persisting tradition, or from an avowed return to the past, as in the copying of Poussin by the neo-classicist artists in France or from a similarity of conditions, purposes, and means, which produced common tendencies in widely separated arts, as in the case of Courbet and the French realists of the 17th century who emanate from the middle class.

In the second place, the character of an art at a given moment cannot be said to reflect the psychology of a whole people or nation; it reflects more often the psychology of a single class, the class for which such art is made, or the dominant class, which sets the tone of all artistic expression. Thus the art of German peasants in the 18th century is more like that of French peasants than the art of German noblemen. And, in turn, the art of German noblemen is closer to that of the French court than the latter is to the art of French peasants. We see in such examples how crucial are the specific social and economic differences, how they obliterate the supposed racial and national constants.

The variety of art within a country and the accord between countries may be described in another way—the arts of the economically advanced countries in Europe today are more like each other than the arts of any one country are like its own mediaeval or Renaissance arts. French "Fauve" painting is more like German expressionist painting than either is like the native art of the 17th century.

During the last hundred years the differences between the styles of a single art, like painting, within a single country, have become very striking, and most striking of all, in the country which has been the undoubted leader in modern art. In 1860, a visitor to Paris could see new works by Ingres, Delacroix, Corot, Daumier, Courbet, Manet, Degas and Pissarro, not to mention the academic painters. In 1936 this variety is even more evident. Nor is it limited to France. In

Louis Schanker

almost every European country we may see side by side examples of academic, classicistic, romantic, realistic, impressionist and abstract art, which are irreducible to a national or racial constant.

There are, of course, qualities in some German paintings today which are less developed in French works, and vice-versa. But since these qualities are neither exclusively German nor common to all artists who speak the German language or live in Germany, and since they are not the distinguishing qualities of German art in many periods in the past, it would be wrong to suppose that they are permanent racial characteristics, inherent in German blood. They are due rather to the cultural peculiarities of the country, to peculiarities of tradition and history and the thousand and one continually changing material and social circumstances which form and transform human life.

How the specific local conditions affect the presumed racial character in art is evident enough in the art produced by Jews. The Hebrew ornamented manuscripts of the middle ages are usually in the style of the region in which they were made. In Paris they are Parisian, in the Rhineland, Rhenish, in Venice, Venetian. Even the Hebrew handwriting is affected by the culture of the country. A scholar who is familiar with the styles of Latin writing in Germany and Italy in the 15th century can often tell at once, even if he is ignorant of the Hebrew language and alphabet, whether a Hebrew manuscript comes from Italy or Germany.

In modern times we can observe the same relation in the paintings of Jews. Ruthenstein is an Englishman, Pissarro, a Frenchman, Soutine, a Russian, Pechstein, a German. It is very doubtful that a critic, unacquainted with these painters and ignorant of their work, could judge from any formal detail or pervasive quality of their paintings that they were all produced by Jews.

The writers who try to explain modern art as the evil work of the Jews, attack Jewish intellectualism as the cause of abstract art, Jewish emotionalism as the cause of expressionistic art, and Jewish practicality as the cause of realistic art. This ridiculous isolation of the Jews as responsible for modern art is of the same order as the Nazi charge that the Jews as a race are the real pillars of capitalism and also, at the same time, the Bolsheviks who are undermining it.

The third defect of racial interpretations of art lies within the very concept of race. The idea of a pure race is a myth scorned by honest anthropologists. The distinction of sub-races or physical types within the white race, made by modern scholars, cuts across national lines and contradicts the view that nations are racially distinct from each other or that they are formed of homogeneous groups. The same physical types may be found in Germany and France. But even if there were such correspondences of race and nation or race and culture, there would still be no scientific ground for assuming that each race or ethnic group has distinct psychological characteristics bound up with its physical traits; or that one race is superior, that it has biologically rooted potentialities for culture, not given by nature to others. The differences between the cultures of primitive and civilized peoples today are more adequately explained by differences in natural environment, by historical circumstances, by the effects of favorable and limiting conditions. Psychological tests have revealed no significant inherited inferiority of the so-called backward peoples.

Applied to France, these scientific considerations yield the following result—the art of France is not the art of a homogeneous biological group, with common physical characteristics, but simply the art produced by people of varying ethnic composition within certain political boundaries, more or less shifting. The com-

munity of language and customs is constantly mistaken for a community of blood or physical characters. The history of the inhabitants of France shows clearly that they are formed by the intermixture of different cultural groups, Celtic, Iberian, Basque, Frankish, Gothic, and the prehistoric peoples of the stone and bronze ages. The products of this mixture show a considerable range in physical traits, corresponding only roughly to geographical divisions. A study of the family origins of the French painters of the nineteenth century shows further that they come of mixed stocks, from various parts of the country. Is there any group more French—to use the nationalist language—than the Impressionists? Monet came from Le Havre in the North, Degas was born of a Creole mother and a French father who had one Italian parent, Sisley was born in England of English parents, and Pissarro was a West Indies Jew with a Creole mother.

What unites these artists stylistically is the common culture in which they grew up and produced their art. It is more important to recognize that Monet, Sisley, Degas and Pissarro were the sons of merchants, and that all four painted for Parisian society in the last third of the nineteenth century, than it is to observe the shapes of their skulls or noses or to determine their ultimate racial origin.

If this analysis is correct, then we must denounce appeals for an American art which identify the American with a specific blood group or race, or which identify American art with supposedly fixed and inherent psychological characters inherited from the past. We can only condemn as chauvinistic and cheap a remark like Mr. Craven's to the effect that Alfred Stieglitz, as a Hoboken Jew, cannot be a judge of American art. By a similar logic, Mr. Craven, coming from a region which has contributed so little to the world's painting and criticism, should not be taken seriously as a writer on European art.

On the other hand, it is evident that the effort to create art in America will proceed from the conditions of life in this country, conditions which, far from being stable or uniform, are varied and in constant change. The American character is as varied as the American scene. The conception of what is or should be American is determined in the last analysis by the history, tradition, means, interests and mode of life of the different classes in society. For a Southern land-owner, the specifically American is different from that for the Southern mill-owner, different from that for the Southern worker or tenant-farmer, who has become conscious of the disparity between his actual condition and his constitutionally guaranteed "American" rights. The Americanism of the Revolutionary tradition of 1776 and the Civil War is interpreted differently according to the desire of reactionary minorities to restrict liberties, of the masses, to increase or preserve them.

The artist does not apply one color rather than another because he considers it more American; but he is compelled today to take his stand with regard to the Americanism of his art by reactionary groups which, in the name of Americanism, provoke racial and national antagonism, trample on democratic rights, and call on him to serve them or starve. It is in accordance with his own needs, understood concretely and in the broadest sense, embracing his need for freedom, for economic security, and for a genuinely democratic and sympathetic audience, and in accordance with what he considers the most progressive forces in American society, that the artist will form his conception of an American art.

Such an art will be uniform or varied, not because there is only one race or there are many races, but according to the nature of social life—uniform to the degree that social and economic differences have been destroyed, varied to the degree that regional, occupational and individual differences have real liberty of expression.

THE CHILDREN'S EXHIBITION

by Moses Soyer

WHILE looking at the lovely show of children's work, arranged by the Artist-Teachers of Project 259 at the Artists' Union, an incident in a story by Chekhoff suddenly came to my mind—A father, in commenting upon a drawing by his son, a youngster of seven, asks him why the man in the picture is obviously out of proportion to the house, which he will never be able to enter. To that the youthful artist replies—"If I should make him the right size, the head would be too small, and there would be no space for his eyes." Which is logical enough.

What amazes one most in the work of children is truthfulness of observation, clarity, and boldness of execution. They are so free from conventions, so freshvisioned that nothing frightens them—no drawing is too difficult, no color too bright. They solve easily and gracefully problems which mature artists fear to attempt.

Children are wide awake. They see all and hear all, even if they do live in a world of their own, a strange, brightly colored, complex world. A little fellow of seven surprised his mother one day by calling her attention to the "Optical Illusion" in his cowboy masterpiece, due to the "Perspective." His pronunciation was perfect, and he was as pleased as Punch.

Nor are children oblivious of social conditions around them, as some psychologists would tell us. One of the best pictures in the show was a workers' demonstration on Union Square. The swirling movement of the masses, the charging horses, the brutality of the police were acutely observed and eloquently expressed. The grey sky and the towering buildings in the background were in accord with the mood of the picture—Another picture that stands out in my memory is a composition of a group of unemployed at the waterfront. This picture was as static as the other one was full of turmoil, as true in observation of movement, gesture and color; so expressive, in fact, that it immediately conveyed a mood of hopelessness, of sadness, of unemployment. Expressionists and Neo-Romanticists would do well to study this picture.

One could go on describing these pictures endlessly, one by one. The wonderful thing about children's exhibitions is that all pictures are good. Children do not seem to make bad pictures. Each new picture is a delightfully fresh and vigorous statement. In this they differ greatly from their elders.

Suffice it to say that the exhibition augurs well for the "Boon-doggling" Artist-Teachers' Project 259. It was a lovely, bright show. The sombre headquarters of the Artists' Union looked as if it were suddenly invaded by spring.

THE LEAGUE OF AMERICAN ARTISTS

THE American Artists' Congress, concluding its three-day session in New York, has brought forth the League of American Artists under the slogan "Against War and Fascism and for the Defense of Culture."

Recognizing the crucial nature of our times, when the forces of social destruction threaten, artists of every esthetic persuasion have banded together in what promises to be the most powerful organization in the history of American art. The organization not only will combat repressive forces in America and throughout the world, but will be the focus of organized effort to further the artist's welfare in every manner. It will be active in combatting repression of freedom of expression; it will support all other artists' organizations which are furthering the economic welfare of artists; it will take part in actions for the furtherance of government art projects; it will conduct its own school; it will arrange exhibitions to broaden the fight against war and fascism; it will produce prints on a mass scale for the same purpose.

The only qualification for membership is that the applicant must be recognized as an artist of standing in the circle in which he functions. All members of the Artists' Congress are automatically eligible. Dues were set at two dollars a year. At the time of this writing, wires, letters and calls for membership are flooding the new organization.

An executive committee of forty-two artists was elected, twenty-seven from New York and fifteen from various centers throughout the nation. The following artists compose the committee: Joe Jones, St. Louis; Cameron Booth, St. Paul; Robert White, Cedar Rapids; Alfred Sessler, Milwaukee; Nicolai Cikovski, Cincinnati; Erle Loran, Minneapolis; Benjamino Bufano, San Francisco; Morris Topchevski, Chicago; Philip Kaplan, Cleveland; Karl Knaths, Provincetown; Walter Ufer, Taos, N. M.; Walt Speck, Detroit; Gilbert Wilson, Terre Haute; John Howard, Santa Fe; Mervin Jules, Baltimore; Herbert Jennings, Philadelphia; Grace Clements, Los Angeles; and from New York, George Biddle, Louis Lozowick, Aaron Douglas, Hugo Gellert, Margaret Bourke-White, Stuart Davis, Peter Blume, Boris Gorelick, Katherine Schmidt, Alexander Stavenitz, Lewis Mumford, Lucien Bernhard, Ralph Pearson, Lynd Ward, Harry Sternberg, Paul Manship, Alexander Brook, E. M. Benson, Henry Billings, Arnold Blanch, Har Gottlieb, Max Weber, William Gropper, Yasuo Kuniyoshi, Aaron Goodelman, and Jerome Klein.

Resolutions were passed pledging to fight against war and fascism; for extension of government art projects; for support of the rental policy; for support of the Artists' Union; for support of art teachers and students; for support of the coordination committee of artists' organizations in New York; condemning motion pictures used against labor; condemning the sending of artists to the C.C.C. Camps; protecting the destruction of Leal's mural; protesting the attempted removal of Herbert Rosengren's mural in Rockport, Ill.; protesting the discrimination against the murals in the Harlem Hospital because the subject matter deals with Negroes; protesting the imprisonment of people fighting for civil rights in Brazil and Cuba; demanding the release of anti-fascist prisoners in Germany and protesting Italian fascism's invasion of Ethiopia. A telegram of greeting was sent to the Negro Congress in Chicago. Telegrams of protest were sent to the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios and to Will Hays, movie czar, for refusing to screen Sinclair Lewis' "It Can't Happen Here" on the grounds that it might lead to international complications.

At the closed sessions, the following delegates spoke from other nations: Julia Codesida of Peru; Jose Clement Orozco of Mexico; David Alfaro Siqueiros of Mexico, and A. Gattorno of Cuba.

The next issue of ART FRONT will carry a fuller account of the proceedings of the Congress.

BOOK REVIEWS

by H. R.

"Catalogue of Posters" by A. Mouron Cassandre. Issued by the Museum of Modern Art.

AN exceptionally able foreword by Ernestine M. Fantl to the "Catalogue of Posters" by Cassandre, issued by the Museum of Modern Art, calls attention to the psychological, social and political importance of the poster-designer's art.

In America, with its competitive money-callousness, on the one hand, and its competitive art-snobbery on the other, Art and commercial art have been kept in separate cells; as a result, we have fallen behind England, the Soviet Union, Belgium, and especially France, in the quality of our contributions to that omnipresent and most insistent of all arts, the bill-poster and the advertisement.

Were "business" to continue to be the sole user of graphic public announcements, American backwardness in poster-making would very likely continue. A new force has, however, entered the field. Hundreds of American artists have affiliated themselves lately with movements and organizations which, for other than money-making purposes, find themselves in the most pressing need of communicating clear and incisive statements in graphic terms. The artists devoted to supplying this need must train themselves to work to order. In the protective fight of artists against fascism and war, for example, the poster-artist is likely to be found in the forefront of art's effectiveness.

Into this incipient situation the exhibition of posters by A. Mouron Cassandre makes a timely entry. Cassandre is not an easel-painter who, like Toulouse-Lautrec, Bonnard, Manet, Beardsley, has turned aside to produce an occasional poster. He is a specialist of poster-art. Yet he utilizes the devices of many schools of modern painting—surrealism, cubism, dada—in order to attain his simple effects. *L'Intransigeant* and *Wagon-Bar* are fine examples of abstract art, which lose nothing as art through their usefulness in advertising a newspaper and a dining-car system. *Ecosse* conveys an invitation to travel on the de Luxe trains of the L.M.S. agency by means of breaking the surface plane of the poster with a brick wall and narrow windows, suggestive of confinement in the city, and then breaking this city plane with a stream that vanishes into a plane of mountains, the whole right half of the design becoming in the process the shadow-mass of a tree, with a wall inside it, around which a toy bird is flying. *Air-Orient,* an air-mail advertisement, also juxtaposes an airplane, bird, and architecture in the surrealist manner.

Since, after studying M. Cassandre's work, there can be no questioning the decorative, communicative, and functional potentialities of poster-art, his show raises important problems for every artist who has something to communicate of a social character.

"Conquest of the Irrational", by Salvador Dali, 35 photographic reproductions and an hors-texte in colors. Julien Levy, publisher. 75c.

LIKE M. Cassandre's catalogue, "Conquest of the Irrational" by Salvador Dali also contains an introduction, this time by the artist himself. This Introduction, and Dali, too, for that matter, is decidedly *not recommended* to those readers of ART FRONT who have complained of the obscurity of some of the articles in these columns. In the eighteen pages on "paranoiac-critical activity" the only simple statement to be found is: "I hate simplicity in all its forms."

Whoever, on the other hand, is not afraid to relax himself with an exercise in cranial irresponsibility, and is therefore prepared to meet Dali on his own esthetic ground, will find embedded in the surrealist junk-piles of psychiatric and mythological phrases a number of cherished clichés of art-philosophy the problem of whether or not the artist "understands" his own work, the antagonism between rationality and intuition, the "materialization" of the "irrational subject", etc. What is interesting in the claim that surrealism has liquidated (sic) the passive, self-narcosized subject of its early days and is now going in for *"systematic* exploration of the irrational." That is to say, surrealism has become affirmative, in theory at least. This does not imply, however, the weakening of the psychiatric, or as Dali likes to call it, "delirious," specialization; it is simply that in order to keep the corpse moving, political and social words, like imperialist and territorial, have been grafted into the surrealist vocabulary.

Unfortunately, of the thirty-five photographic plates, at least one-third are too small to allow the details of Dali's pictorial puns to be distinguished. Considering, however, the price of the book, it is a good buy for anyone who is interested in Dali and has no access to better material.

Comrade Gulliver, by Hugo Gellert. G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York, $2.50.

MR. GELLERT'S book tells a number of one-page anecdotes characteristic of the contradictions of capitalist society, illustrating them with symbolic drawings. For instance, "Gulliver" has a conversation with the superintendent of a textile mill and learns how the workers are kept in a state of virtual imprisonment in the factory-town—and on the opposite page Mr. Gellert illustrates this incident with a drawing of a man caught in a spider's web. A half-page story, dealing with the breaking up of a picket line at City Hall, called Law and Order, is illustrated by a cop's hand holding a club at an angle of fourty-five degrees. "Life, Liberty . . ." is illuminated by a picture of a cat watching a mouse. The stories bring out in a pleasant and popular style the absurdities, viciousness, and hypocrisies of the rule of capital.

THE Arts and Press Guild, New York, was organized by Floyd McNight in order "to demonstrate how writers and artists with the courage of their convictions might bring their works before the public despite unfavorable economic conditions." The first enterprise of this press is the book "Buildings," "A Philosophic Meditation in Verse," by Mr. McNight himself, illustrated in black and white by Samjesther Gelfand, and issued at $1. The poem is the product of a mystical-Utopian approach to modern industrial phenomena, and the illustrations are in character with the literary text.

EXHIBITIONS

A. C. A.—52 W. 8th St. Ishigaki. March 9-23. American Place—Stieglitz—509 Madison Ave. O'Keefe extended through Mar. 7. Another Place—43 W. 8th St. Bertram Hartman. Mar. 1-28. Artists' Union—460 6th Ave. Project 1262 exhibition. Feb. 24-Mar. 14. Contemporary Arts—41 W. 54th St. Charles Logasa, American Romantic. Feb. 24-Mar. 14. Downtown Gallery—113 W. 13th St. Kuniyoshi, Zorach, Fiene and others. Kleemann—38 E. 57th St. Alice Sloane Anderson. Mar.- 2-14. Julien Levy—602 Madison Ave. Paintings by Walter Quirt, the Surrealist seer of today's crisis. Feb. 18-Mar. 9. Pierre Matisse—51 E. 57th St. Paintings by Charles Biderman. Mar. 2-21. Midtown Galleries—605 Madison Ave. Anatol Shulkin, Mar. 2-21. Isaac Soyer, Mar. 23-April 6. Museum of Modern Art—11 W. 53rd St. Important comprehensive exhibit of cubism and abstractions Feb. 23-April 6. New Art Circle—Neumann—509 Madison Ave. Work by Weber, Kandinsky and Josef Albers. Dorothy Paris—56 W. 53rd St. Water-color group. Drawings by Hans Foy, first-rate draughtsman. Feb. 16-Mar. 7. One-man show of Anthony Palazzo. Mar. 8-28. Mrs. C. J. Sullivan—57 E. 56th. Soutine again. Mar. 1-15. Carl Sprinchorn, American Modern. Mar. 17-31. Valentine—69 E. 57th St. Water-colors by Milton Avery, one of America's most original and stimulating painters. Feb. 24-Mar. 7. Leon Hartl. Mar. 8-20. Wildenstein—19 E. 64th St. Retrospective Gaugin show. One of the highlights of the season. Mar. 15-Apr. 28.

MANY of our Union painters have brought up the grievance that their individual exhibits receive no attention from ART FRONT, while the "big names" continue to receive undue publicity. The monthly basis of our magazine is partly responsible for this condition. The exhibits are usually ended long before ART FRONT takes to press. As for the "big names," their influence extends to us all and no serious painter can deny them a certain controversial distinction. For all that, the Union members are highly justified in their criticism and this department will try as far as possible to collaborate with them. Future exhibitors can aid us by notifying ART FRONT a month in advance of their showings.

Among high spots overlooked, the Myron Sokole display of gouaches at the

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Midtown Galleries, a while ago, displayed a far more sensitive interpretation of the American scene than the dull Hoppers and Burchfields around us. At the Dorothy Paris Gallery, Mark Datz continued to weave subtle, imaginative forms through his mesh of rich color. This gallery can boast of the growing power in the work of such sturdy members as Lonergan, Foy and Martini as well as the modern experiments of Dirk. The "Ten" carried their expressionist siege to the Municipal Gallery, where Thomas Craven, bemoaning the first democratic exhibiting rights our artists have won, denounced the group as "upstart modernists." Another vital group of Union members have just finished a two-week run at the same Gallery. The entire list included Abbey, Baumbach, Gotcliffe, Kovesi, Kruckman, Laredo, Lehman, La Pinto, Ludwig, Neel, Nisonoff, Rose and Schnitzler. Most of these names should be better known, particularly those of Nisonoff, Kruckman and Alice Neel. On the floor below, Ferstadt, Moldovan and Faber displayed their varied talents.

The Federal Art Project Gallery made quite a stir with two impressive exhibits, paintings by project art teachers and a display of some of the easel work done under W. P. A. supervision. To the latter show came many of our Ministers of Education, in a frenzied rush to acquire art at the nominal figure of $3.50 per canvas, to cover cost of material. Who says the government isn't getting its money's worth?

All those who have followed these varied exhibits cannot fail to notice that the most talented, courageous and provocative painting and sculpture done in this country is issuing forth directly from our Artists' Union members. The moderns and social scene painters are forging ahead vigorously. There are even visible signs of a liaison between the two schools. Whether such an alliance be possible or valid is a question we throw our readers in the hope of receiving stimulating correspondence.

—J. S.

NATIONAL ORGANIZATION

(*Continued from page 2*)

sure and campaign as an organized group.

In building your organization, it may or may not be desirable to call it an artists' union. The word "union" may still be strange to some artists. Although you can point out the victories of the New York Artists' Union and, though a universal name would be best for all similar economic artists' organizations, the name becomes relatively unimportant as long as you have a program and plan of action that would be of economic benefit to artists.

The New York Artists' Union's only qualification for membership is that the applicant be a professional artist. An economic organization of artists should include all artists who have practiced art for five years or more, who have exhibited, or who can show work that shows professional capacity. We do not consider the quality or school of painting, whether academic, modern, expressionistic, etc. The organization should be non-political and non-sectarian in character, but should support all actions of other organizations that may help artists win economic security.

Keep in touch with the National Organizing Committee of the Artists' Union. We can assure you of prompt attention to your letters. The purpose of this committee is to develop a National Artists' Union. At present, this can be helped by frequent exchange of correspondence and, if possible, personal visits of respective representatives to each other. The formation of a National Artists' Union, with locals all over the country, is the next step. It will be the most effective weapon for the establishment of both local and national permanent art projects for all unemployed artists.

* * *

Questionnaire for all artists and artists' groups interested in forming Artists' Unions.

What is the number of artists in your city, town, village?

What are the present sources of income or aid to artists?

What is the gallery, museum and open air show situation and its relationship to the artists?

What is the percentage of unemployed or needy artists?

Is there any work-relief set up for artists, white collar, professionals, single men and women, etc.?

What are the relief requirements?

What other art organizations or associations are there?

What is their character and composition of membership?

If you can give us any other information that pertains to the artists' situation in your locality, we would appreciate it.

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